

Pcounter for Windows from Altman Technologies

All businesses, large and small continue to look for ways to make significant reductions in their operational costs and a biting recession can only heighten this. IT departments will no doubt feel the pinch, but it's surprising how few IT staff realise that effective management of internal printing resources can result in some seriously big savings.

The situation isn't helped by the limited vendor specific feature sets offered by many print management products, but Altman Technologies comes to the rescue as its Pcounter delivers a complete solution that can help you take back control of all your printers - regardless of the make or model. Pcounter can monitor all printers and provide details on usage, but it offers so much more as it can enforce accounting, print quotas and billing, and it is also capable of applying these controls to photocopiers, multi-function devices and even plotters. It keeps track of all printing activity and stores details on every print job including page counts, the size in pages and bytes, paper sizes, date and times, which printer was used, whether colour was used and so on.

Pcounter uses a single port monitor which supports four different connection modes. So printers attached locally to workstations can be controlled with the LPT and USB port monitors, whilst the LPR and Appsocket monitors cover the most common network print servers and also many older types of print server. Support for SNMP allows Pcounter to gather detailed information including mono and colour pages printed. This pays dividends for users who have documents with a mixture of both, as it is possible to charge them precisely for the number of colour pages printed within each document.

On review is the Windows version, but Pcounter is also available for NetWare networks. Pcounter comprises a number of separate components and you start with the Pcontrol utility which lists all systems on the network and provides the tools to configure the discovered printers. The Pcounter utility itself is launched from here and used to view and configure all printers and ports.

For each printer you can decide which paper sizes can be used and set up mono and colour costs for permitted types. For duplexing, Pcounter can divide page counts in half if you're charging for

paper and impatient users with a predilection for hitting the print button on their application again and again when their print doesn't appear, are also covered as Pcounter can automatically delete duplicate jobs. Pcounter rules add another dimension to print management as these determine how jobs are handled. Print jobs over a certain size can be blocked or deleted, prints moved to the top or bottom of queues, jobs with a high cost can be stopped from printing or automatically sent to another printer.

Pcounter supports workgroups but is more effective in an Active Directory environment. With the Pcounter Administration utility pointed at our AD domain controller, we could view all users and groups, add and subtract print credits and generate detailed reports of all printing activity. The Pcounter package includes web server based utilities that allow users to monitor their print usage and view account balances, whilst the Popup tool lets them input accounting information for each job. Pcounter Pro allows ID or PIN numbers to be mapped to users and groups so that swipe cards could also be used to control access to printers.

Businesses that need to establish control of their printing resources and reduce operational costs will find Pcounter a simple solution that can pay for itself very quickly. It's also highly suited to the educational sector allowing cash-strapped schools and colleges to charge students for using their printing and copying facilities, with great convenience.

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Product: Pcounter for Windows

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